



March 7, 2008

Dear Governor Schwarzenegger:

The California Tuberculosis Controllers Association (CTCA) has grave concerns regarding the elimination of the essential Molecular Beacons TB test for drug resistance, which is being required of the California TB Control Branch to meet mandated budgetary reductions. The Beacon test allows for the rapid (24–36 hours, rather than 6–8 weeks) detection of multiple drug-resistant TB (MDR-TB), a serious form of TB that is resistant to our best TB antibiotics, with no proven preventive treatment for contacts to this disease. It is more deadly, more costly to treat, and harder to cure than standard TB. Last week's World Health Organization (WHO) report on drug-resistant TB confirms the global emergency and spread of this rapidly growing problem. Since California is a primary portal of entry into the U.S., the elimination of this important diagnostic tool will seriously limit our ability to protect Californians from this pervasive menace. Rapid detection is essential in providing appropriate TB antibiotics and preventing even more dangerous, less curable forms of extensive drug resistance (XDR-TB). The California TB control community cannot lose this valuable diagnostic tool, which is only available through the California Department of Public Health's Microbial Diseases Laboratory.

CTCA is also concerned about reductions in Local Assistance Base awards to local health jurisdictions (LHJs) as a result of the 10 % budget cut to the State's General Funds. LHJs rely on these funds to find, test, treat and prevent tuberculosis in all individuals exposed to TB or at risk for the disease, regardless of the complexities involved. Reductions in the Local Assistance Base awards will adversely affect the core infrastructure needed to manage this complex disease. On top of additional federal funding cuts, it appears that we are beginning another cycle of neglect like the one in the late 1980s/ early 90s which led to MDR-TB outbreaks and the resurgence of TB in California and the U.S.

Given the current budget deficit and absent the possibility of raising taxes, we do understand the need to reduce expenditures. However, in order to minimize the threat to the public's health, we are requesting that the California State TB Control Branch be granted flexibility in prioritizing essential TB control needs and determining where those budget reductions should occur.

TB control is a mandated program and service. If budget cuts are enforced in the above-mentioned areas, we will be unable to meet this mandate. In the area of control, emergence, and further transmission of MDR-/XDR-TB, this becomes an emergency now recognized by both the Centers for Disease Control and the WHO. Emergence and failure to control this type of TB is considered a biological hazard—and our inability to detect it and treat it appropriately will seriously impact California citizens.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Julie Low, MD
President, California TB Controllers Association

cc: Members of the California State Legislature

Mark Horton, MD, MSPH, Division Director, CDPH

Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House, United States Congress, Congresswoman, California, 8th District

Barbara Boxer, Senator, California, United States Congress

Dianne Feinstein, Senator, California, United States Congress

Kenneth Castro, MD, MPH, United States Assistant Surgeon General
Bonita Sorenson, MD, MBA, Chief Deputy Director of Policy and Programs, CDPH
Gilberto Chavez, MD, MPH, Deputy Director, Center for Infectious Disease, CDPH
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Ann Lindsay, President, CCLHO/HOAC
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Bruce Pomer, Executive Director, HOAC
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Paul Knepprath, Vice President, ALAC Government Relations Offices
Victoria Jauregui Burns, President, CCLAD
David Dassey, MD, President, CACDC
Richard Frankenstein, MD, President, California Medical Association
Michael W. Peterson, MD, President, California Thoracic Society
Thomas E. Addison, MD, FCCP, President, American College of Chest Physicians, California
Joanne Carter, Legislative Director, RESULTS
Carol Pozsik, CEO, National TB Controllers Association